DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 439 514 EA 030 322

TITLE	Comprehensive School Reform: Five Lessons from the Field.
INSTITUTION	Education Commission of the States, Denver, CO.
SPONS AGENCY	Annenberg Foundation, St. Davids, PA.
PUB DATE	1999-12-00
NOTE	36p.
AVAILABLE FROM	ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th Street, Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427 (AN-99-01, $8.00 plus postage). Tel: 303-299-3692.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom (055) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Change Strategies; *Comprehensive Programs; *Educational Change; Elementary Secondary Education; *Improvement Programs; Models; School Effectiveness

ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a 5-year study conducted by governors and other state and local policymakers on education reform. It is intended for a general audience and offers advice on what it takes to implement comprehensive school reforms. The document elaborates on five lessons learned in implementing comprehensive school reform: (1) comprehensive school reform changes the way schools, districts, and states do business; (2) legislative leadership sets the tone; (3) state education department support is key to long-term success; (4) teachers make or break comprehensive school reform; and (5) evaluation of results--early and often--is critical. The text focuses on the dramatic difference between comprehensive reforms and piecemeal improvement strategies that have long dominated education. It stresses the importance of district support in any reform, emphasizing the importance of finding a strong match between schools and reform models and the need to create stability in schools in spite of administrative changes. The document illustrates the benefits of union support and professional development, and the importance of showing parents, teachers, and students positive results. It states that comprehensive reforms will keep state leaders on the mark as regards education issues, will create savvy consumers, and will balance supply and demand in education. (Contains 36 references.) (RJM)

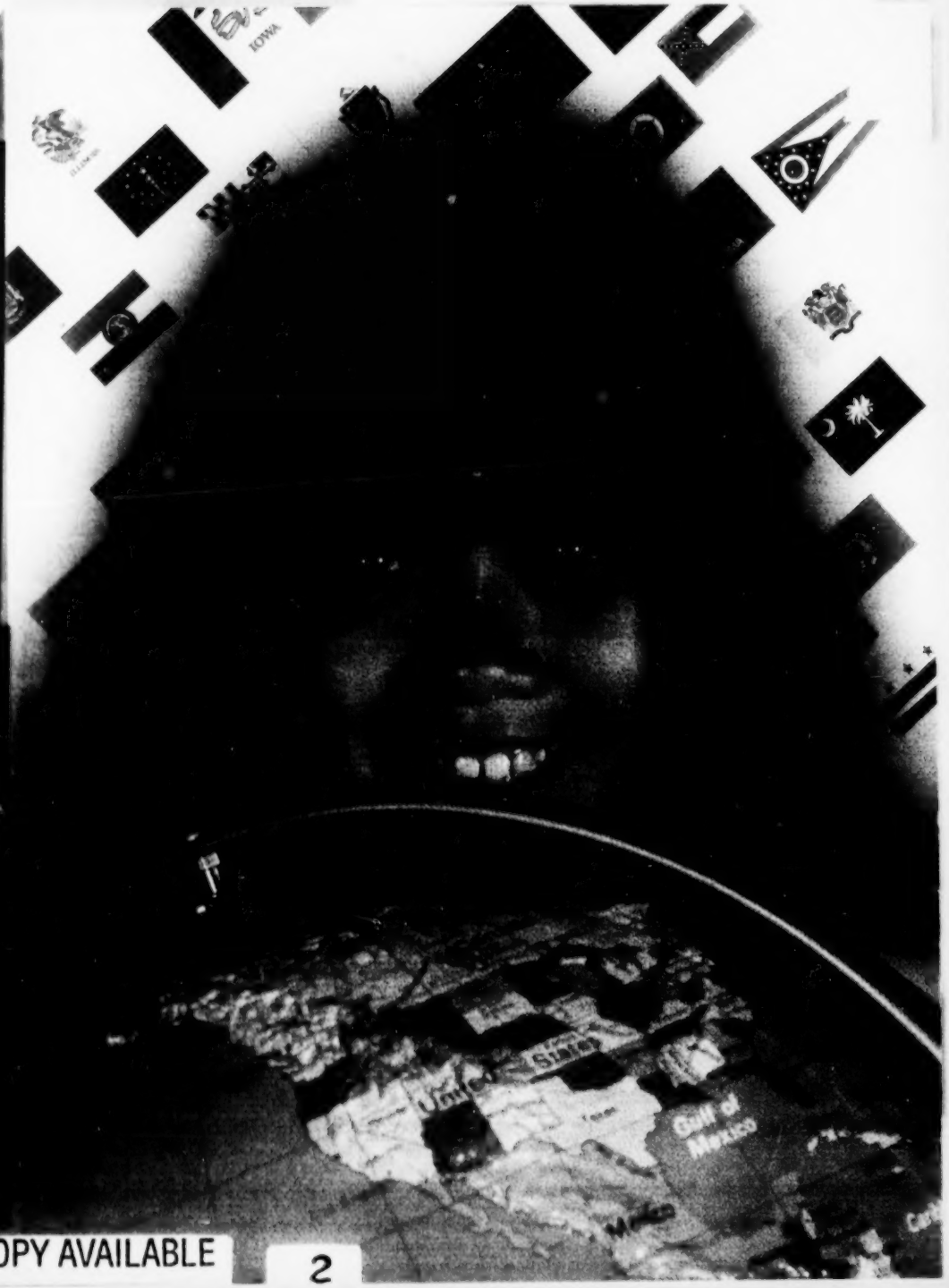
Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 439 514

EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

ECS

Comprehensive School Reform: Five Lessons From The Field



PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. F. Walker

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

What's Inside

- The role of legislators, state departments and teachers
- The importance of evaluation
- Comprehensive school reform resources

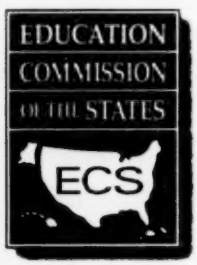
EA030332

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

2

Comprehensive School Reform: Five Lessons From The Field

December 1999



Education Commission of the States (ECS)

707 17th Street, Suite 2700

Denver, CO 80202-3427

303-299-3600

fax: 303-296-8332

e-mail: ecs@ecs.org

www.ecs.org

This publication was funded by the Annenberg Foundation.

Copies of this book are available for $8.00 plus postage and handling from the ECS Distribution Center, 707 17th St., Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427, 303-299-3692. Ask for No. AN-99-01. ECS accepts prepaid orders, MasterCard, American Express and Visa. All sales are final.

© Copyright 1999 by the Education Commission of the States (ECS). All rights reserved.

The Education Commission of the States is a nonprofit, nationwide interstate compact formed in 1965 to help governors, state legislators, state education officials and others develop policies to improve the quality of education. The ECS office is located in Denver, Colorado.

It is ECS policy to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

ECS is pleased to have other organizations or individuals share its materials with their constituents. To request permission to excerpt part of this publication, either in print or electronically, please write or fax Josie Canales, Education Commission of the States, 707 17th St., Suite 2700, Denver, CO 80202-3427; fax: 303-296-8332.

Postage and handling charges if your order totals: Up to $10.00, **$3.00**; $10.01-$25.00, **$4.25**; $25.01-$50.00, **$5.75**; $50.01-$75.00, **$8.50**; $75.01-$100.00, **$10.00**; over $100.00, **$12.00**.

Generous discounts are available for bulk orders of single publications. They are: 10-24 copies, 10% discount; 25-49 copies, 20%; 50-74 copies, 30%; 75-99 copies, 40%; and 100+ copies, 50%.

Table of Contents

Introduction 2

The Lessons from the Field

1 Comprehensive School Reform Changes the Way Schools, Districts and States Do Business. 4

2 Legislative Leadership Sets the Tone. . . . 8

3 State Education Department Support Is Key to Long-Term Success. 12

4 Teachers Make Comprehensive School Reform Happen. 16

5 Evaluation – Early and Often – Is Critical. . . 20

A Look at the Future of Comprehensive School Reform 24

Selected Resources 27

Acknowledgments 29

Introduction

If educators have learned anything about school reform, it is that a piecemeal approach to changing poor classroom practice is a losing battle. A collection of isolated programs does not add up to schoolwide improvement.

In recent years, attention increasingly has focused on a radically different approach to improving the quality and performance of schools – comprehensive school reform. Rather than layering one program on top of another, this approach focuses on redesigning and integrating all aspects of a school – curriculum, instruction, teacher training and professional development, school management, governance, assessment, and parent and community involvement.

This new generation of reform uses individual "models" that combine the best of what research has found to work in the classroom. These models emphasize high academic standards for all children, clear and consistent goals, coordinated district and school restructuring and accountability. Some models emphasize technology, others focus on basic skills and others center on team teaching. More than 20 models are truly comprehensive in scope.

Since the mid-1980s, these promising models have been embraced by thousands of schools across the country. The number of schools using such an approach is expected to grow substantially over the next few years thanks to the $150 million Comprehensive School Reform Development (CSRD) project enacted by Congress in 1997. Another $134 million was approved in the second year of funding in fiscal year 1999.

Through CSRD, more than 2,000 schools across the country will receive grants of at least $50,000 to implement comprehensive school reform over three years. The move reflects a growing belief that comprehensive school reform is a way to raise the academic achievement of all students and improve the school climate. It also recognizes that the hard work of reforming schools requires the entire school – not isolated efforts.

Background

Comprehensive school reform's beginnings are rooted in the work of leading reformers such as Stanford University's Henry Levin, Harvard University's Ted Sizer and Johns Hopkins University's Robert Slavin. From Levin's Accelerated Schools Project to Slavin's Success for All to Sizer's Coalition of Essential Schools, these models laid the early groundwork for what was then – and sometimes still is – called "whole-school reform." These models and others, such as High Schools That Work and Core Knowledge, have been adopted by more than 4,500 schools nationwide.

This reform initiative was thrust into the national spotlight in 1989 when President George Bush and the nation's governors convened the historic National Education Summit in Charlottesville, Virginia. Following the summit, the Bush administration launched its America 2000 initiative, which established national goals for public education and called for intensive research and development of innovative approaches to designing, organizing and managing schools.

In response, a private, nonprofit entity – the New American Schools Development Corporation (now called New American Schools [NAS]) – was formed and financed by business leaders to identify and provide visibility to the best school restructuring ideas it could find. More than 1,500 schools in 45 states are using NAS models, and seven school districts and groups of districts have committed to putting NAS models in place in 30% of their schools by next year.

The partnership

With generous support from the Annenberg Foundation, ECS, in partnership with NAS, began in 1995 to work with governors and other state and local policymakers to raise awareness about comprehensive school reform. This partnership built upon experience gleaned in an earlier ECS project

called Re:Learning. In that effort, ECS joined forces with the Coalition of Essential Schools to improve the education system "from schoolhouse to statehouse" in order to raise student achievement. ECS helped state and district leaders rethink and redesign administrative structures, regulations and other major features of the education system to create a climate more hospitable to school-level innovation.

During the course of this current work, ECS has worked side-by-side with state leaders, educators, policymakers and state superintendents across the country to help them implement comprehensive school reform efforts. ECS has assisted policymakers in becoming more sophisticated consumers, decisionmakers and shapers of the reform process. ECS also has helped create state policies that support innovative, diverse, high-performance schools by providing technical assistance; training; national and statewide conferences; and print, video and electronic resources to policymakers and educators nationwide.

Throughout the project, ECS worked in partnership with staff from several organizations, including NAS, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform, the regional education laboratories, the American Federation of Teachers, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the U.S. Department of Education. In addition to national organizations, ECS learned much from principals, teachers, superintendents and students about what it takes to implement comprehensive school reform models and was privy to seeing these challenges up close.

The lessons

The ECS/Annenberg project has led to new state and district policies that encourage and support comprehensive school reform. While the approach is still too new to have many results from long-term studies that show the impact on students, some findings are becoming available.

There are other, less tangible dividends as well. Five years of work with the people who make the policies that shape K-12 schools have yielded various insights about what it takes to make sweeping changes to American education. This report seeks to capture these "lessons learned" for a general audience that may be learning of – or considering – comprehensive school reform for the first time. It offers straightforward advice from leaders who have already field-tested their successes and mistakes. It is a report about what it takes to implement serious, thoughtful and difficult reform.

This report elaborates on five lessons learned in implementing comprehensive school reform, three of which relate to the people involved:

- **Comprehensive school reform changes the way schools, districts and states do business.**
- **Legislative leadership sets the tone.**
- **State education department support is key to long-term success.**
- **Teachers make or break comprehensive school reform.**
- **Evaluation of results – early and often – is critical.**

In some cases, these lessons confirm what educators and policymakers have known all along. In other cases, new insights have come from hard work at the school, district and state levels. As educators and legislators continue to identify what works and what does not in the classroom, ECS offers these "lessons learned" to assist in their efforts.

See the Information Clearinghouse Promising Practices section of the ECS Web site (www.ecs.org) for evidence of comprehensive school reform models improving student achievement.

1 Comprehensive School Reform Changes the Way Schools, Districts and States Do Business.

A popular approach to school reform looks something like this: select a program that emphasizes one subject, for example, literacy, math or drug prevention. Target a small, select group of students or even the entire student population. Layer one program on top of another. Don't take time to assess whether these efforts improve student achievement – they are popular and easy to implement.

Think this is what it takes to reform today's schools? Think again. While steeped in good intentions, such isolated efforts do not come close to tackling what the public is calling for – better schools, better teachers and better learning for students.

Comprehensive school reform is not just another school improvement strategy – it is a significant leap forward in reforming today's public schools. Comprehensive school reform addresses all students, all academic subjects and all teachers. When done well, a school is overhauled from top to bottom. Adding one program on top of another is thrown out in favor of the much more difficult work of reorganizing schools, targeting professional development for teachers and principals, changing curriculum and making tough budget decisions.

In short, comprehensive school reform transforms the way a school functions to accomplish one goal: improved achievement for all students.

Transforming the way schools operate

Comprehensive school reform is not easy work, say the principals, teachers, parents and legislators who have been there. It demands a great deal of soul-searching. At times, it can be downright uncomfortable and messy.

Teachers have to consider curriculum changes that may contrast with what they have taught for years – and how they have taught it. Principals' leadership skills are put to the test. School leaders and faculty grapple with significant budget decisions to pay for comprehensive school reform models. Some prized programs may have to be cut. And, more time is needed before and after school to sort out these tough issues.

Together, school staff ultimately must define what it takes to transform their school, identify what success looks like, and then figure out how to get it done. It is no small task. It begins with faculty taking a hard look at student data to help identify what their students' greatest needs are.

Once a school has a firmer grasp of its student population, demographics, test scores and other data, faculty must decide which comprehensive school reform model will work best for their students. Selecting a model can be daunting – there are more than 100 models to choose from. What's more, only 20-30 of these models are truly comprehensive in scope.

Some school staffs channel all their hopes into the model, believing that it alone will fix any problem their school has. While a model can be an important and even central part of comprehensive school reform, it cannot be the whole picture. A school that takes on a comprehensive reform model without first assessing student needs likely will encounter confusion, disappointment and even failure down the road because the staff lacks vision and commitment.

"Often, schools pursue a reform agenda without clear goals or a strong sense of what they're doing," says researcher Joe Johnson of the University of Texas at Austin. "The subsequent results may be only slight gains or even no improvement in student achievement."

District support essential

Experience has shown that changing individual schools is not enough. School districts must support schools engaged in comprehensive reform, including developing policies that do the following:

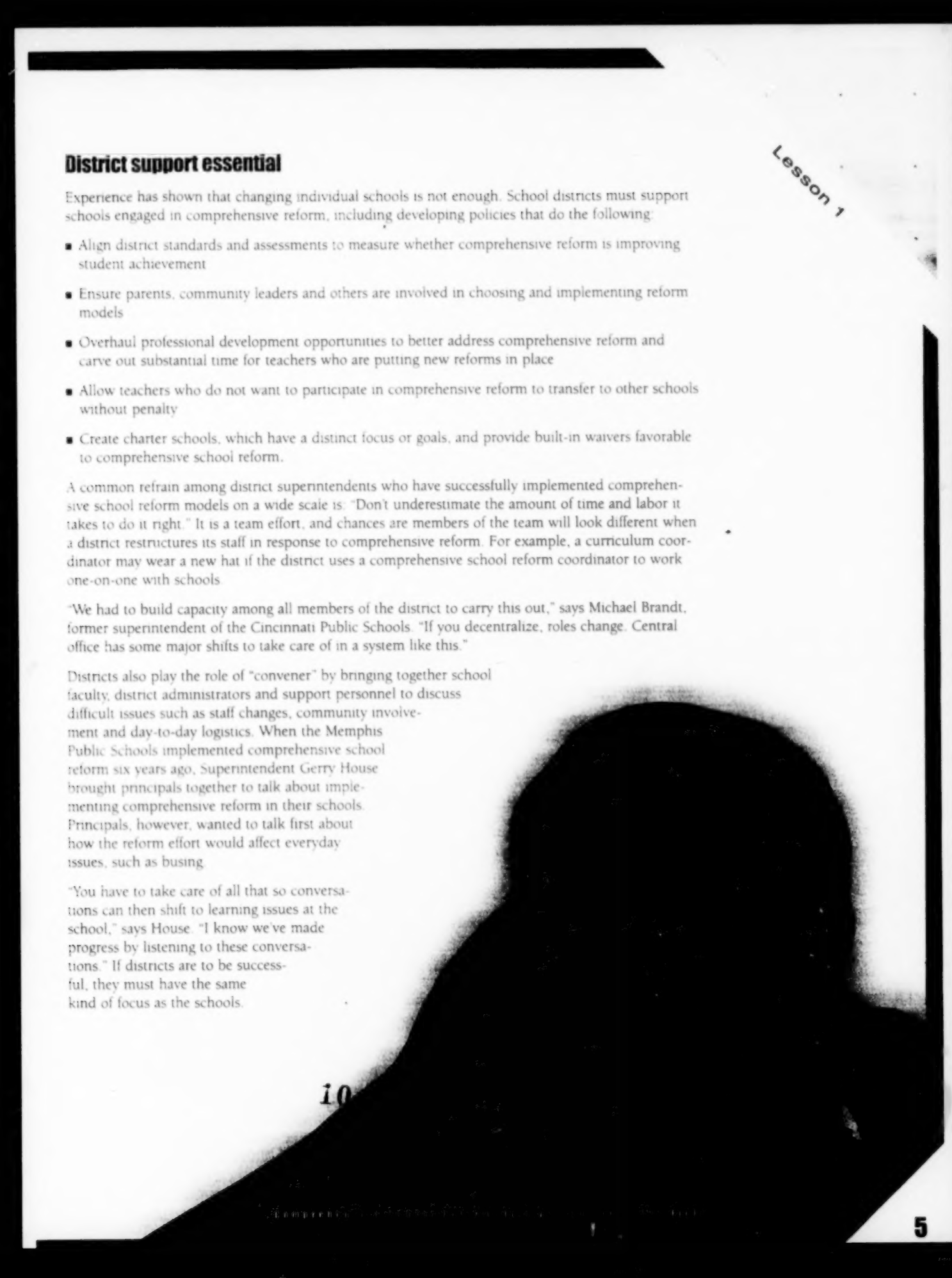
- Align district standards and assessments to measure whether comprehensive reform is improving student achievement
- Ensure parents, community leaders and others are involved in choosing and implementing reform models
- Overhaul professional development opportunities to better address comprehensive reform and carve out substantial time for teachers who are putting new reforms in place
- Allow teachers who do not want to participate in comprehensive reform to transfer to other schools without penalty
- Create charter schools, which have a distinct focus or goals, and provide built-in waivers favorable to comprehensive school reform.

A common refrain among district superintendents who have successfully implemented comprehensive school reform models on a wide scale is: "Don't underestimate the amount of time and labor it takes to do it right." It is a team effort, and chances are members of the team will look different when a district restructures its staff in response to comprehensive reform. For example, a curriculum coordinator may wear a new hat if the district uses a comprehensive school reform coordinator to work one-on-one with schools.

"We had to build capacity among all members of the district to carry this out," says Michael Brandt, former superintendent of the Cincinnati Public Schools. "If you decentralize, roles change. Central office has some major shifts to take care of in a system like this."

Districts also play the role of "convener" by bringing together school faculty, district administrators and support personnel to discuss difficult issues such as staff changes, community involvement and day-to-day logistics. When the Memphis Public Schools implemented comprehensive school reform six years ago, Superintendent Gerry House brought principals together to talk about implementing comprehensive reform in their schools. Principals, however, wanted to talk first about how the reform effort would affect everyday issues, such as busing.

"You have to take care of all that so conversations can then shift to learning issues at the school," says House. "I know we've made progress by listening to these conversations." If districts are to be successful, they must have the same kind of focus as the schools.



Making state dollars work smarter for education reform

Comprehensive school reform not only changes the way schools and districts operate, it also forces state leaders to think harder about pooling increasingly tight resources for greatest impact. Just as it forces school staffs to be clear about their goals for improving student achievement, comprehensive school reform prompts many state-level education leaders to focus on bringing all of their resources to bear on improving schools.

Legislators want to make taxpayer dollars work to improve education, typically without raising additional funds to do so. One way to do this is by combining federal comprehensive school reform funds with Goals 2000 money, Title I dollars and other state revenue earmarked for low-performing schools. With that amount of money, state leaders can target dollars where they are needed most and see results.

Deciding how best to allocate funds is one of the most powerful ways for state policymakers to help comprehensive school reform take root. Now, with the federal comprehensive school reform funding available, there is an added incentive to do so. Some legislators are pushing for the entire federal Title I program – literally billions of dollars – to focus exclusively on comprehensive school reform.

Some of the ways states are tapping different funding sources to support comprehensive reform include the following:

- Wisconsin assembled state leaders of funding programs such as Title I, special education and Goals 2000. Together, they created training programs for school and district leaders on how to direct these funding sources toward comprehensive school reform.
- In Florida, the state listed all of the state and federal grants that could be used to help pay for comprehensive reform efforts and shared the list with districts and schools.
- California, Florida, Illinois, Maryland and New York required schools applying for federal comprehensive school reform funds to explain, in detail, how the school and district will use all of their financial and personnel resources to support the effort.
- The Illinois Department of Education is developing plans to use Goals 2000 Leadership money to support additional schools not funded by the federal grants directed at comprehensive school reform.

Drop Mandates in Favor of Passion for Change

Everett Barnes, president of RMC Research Corporation in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, has been actively involved in providing technical assistance and support to the New York State Department of Education in designing its CSRD application and evaluation protocols.

What do schools need to consider before they adopt a reform model?
Schools need to consider whether they are prepared to engage in processes that will fundamentally change how they think and behave when it comes to meeting the needs of all their students. Dialogue — getting people to talk about what comprehensive reform looks like, the why and the "so what" — is the most powerful part of the process. We've had conversations with district and building leaders to try to convince them that they shouldn't be selecting external models and then attempting to convince faculty in schools that it is good for them. There needs to be a passion for the proposed change that is more than administrative mandate.

What is the state's role in assisting schools with the reform process?
The state's role should be to set high standards and expectations for schools implementing comprehensive school reform, to take aggressive action when those standards are not met by limiting or eliminating funding, or to provide more funds when the commitment is clearly being demonstrated.

States need to model the behaviors they expect of districts and schools engaged in reform. They need to systematically evaluate their processes and make adjustments that will make them more effective. The state's role can be summarized in three key functions: oversight, leadership and technical assistance.

Memphis: Consistent Focus and Leadership

Gerry House has been superintendent of the Memphis City Schools for six years. The district began discussions with ECS and NAS shortly after she arrived, and Memphis became one of the first districts to adopt NAS models on a wide scale. Starting in fall 1999, every school in the district is implementing some kind of comprehensive school reform model.

What support did you get at the state level?
We were one of two districts early on to ask for "Break the Mold" status, which the legislature created so schools could ask for waivers from some regulations. That was a real bonus for us.

Commissioner of Education Jane Walters was a former Memphis principal – she understood the challenges we would face and helped us work through state bureaucracy. Sometimes at the local level, we assume there are things that cannot be done, and people at the state level who reinforce that, when in fact there's probably not a lot of *legislation* that prevents it from happening. There is a tradition that keeps it from happening.

What advice do you have for others implementing comprehensive school reform?
It's going to require focus and leadership. School people are so used to something coming and going, they aren't going to invest the energy and ownership if they don't have the sense it's here to stay. We've done a lot more culture-changing than curriculum-changing.

2 Legislative Leadership Sets the Tone.

In comprehensive school reform, as in many ambitious undertakings, change has taken place where people have been willing to offend by challenging the status quo.

Elected officials sound the call for change by unmasking failures in the system and offering solutions, such as comprehensive school reform. By challenging conventional thinking, these leaders have begun to move the dialogue about how to reform schools to a new level, making it more difficult to return to comfortable, status-quo conversations.

When difficult but necessary education reform does take hold, improved test results and a track record of success discourage people from returning to the way things were before. Legislators and other state policymakers play a significant role in providing bold leadership that sets the tone for change and establishes comprehensive school reform as a strategy for overhauling low-performing schools. They do the following:

- Provide a strong voice for change
- Build coalitions to support reform efforts, especially ones that may be uncomfortable at first
- Create waivers to allow districts and schools to make policy changes to implement comprehensive reform (for example, increased time for staff development)
- Require that comprehensive reform efforts include the nine components mentioned in the federal legislation (see page 10)
- Allocate funding, when appropriate, to support thoughtful comprehensive reform efforts.

State legislators can create the right conditions to help school reforms grow and flourish by getting rid of cumbersome regulations and providing leadership to schools and districts. Legislators also can help schools and districts make sure that nothing extra creeps in to detract from the important task at hand.

What's more, research indicates that schools and districts need time to investigate programs that are effective and a good match with both local needs and state standards. State policymakers who rush the process for political reasons may be dismayed to see the quality of implementation suffer.

While it is not the job of state policymakers to dictate exactly what reform model each school uses, it is important, however, for them to ensure there is real choice in public schools. Legislators need to make sure there is enough flexibility in the system so that schools (and students) can choose what they need. Funding allocations can encourage a wide diversity of models (see page 11 for examples) that will meet the needs of all the students in the system, not just specific students.

Because policymakers control funding, it is up to them to see that it is applied in the way it can do the most good. A "bucketful of dollars" in one place will not necessarily help; nor will a thin stream of funding that does not come close to supporting comprehensive school reform. By connecting federal dollars with other funding sources and directing them at the places most in need, policymakers can have a tremendous impact on helping school reform succeed.

Properly done, comprehensive reform should result in higher student achievement and better-functioning schools. State policymakers are ideally positioned to require and fund an evaluation of whether comprehensive school reform, in fact, is bolstering student performance. State standards and assessments can be used to determine how well the reforms have worked and, if not, how they can be improved in the coming years. Also, the state's accountability system comes into play, rewarding schools that have done well with more funding or freedom from regulation, and helping those that have not done well find ways to improve.

Maryland: Insights from Veteran Legislators

Maryland State Senator Barbara Hoffman and Maryland Assemblyman Howard "Pete" Rawlings have been involved with the ECS/Annenberg comprehensive school reform effort from the beginning. Maryland was one of the first states to commit to scaling up comprehensive school reform models.

Should comprehensive school reform be legislated?
Hoffman: In the Maryland legislature, we try to stay out of curriculum decisions because we think that's a slippery slope. We've said, "You must have certain outcomes. You are the educators – you figure out how to get there." We shouldn't even say you have to have whole-school reform or determine what model schools should use.

What are appropriate roles for legislators?
Rawlings: When legislators see a district where schools are performing poorly, they raise the issue with their colleagues about the need for change and introduce legislation such as charter schools or public school choice. State departments of education have enormous powers that are not used, such as moving into a district to exert influence on its operations. But because the education community is very collegial, state boards are loath to use the heavy hammer until it's actually necessary. Usually the leverage or catalyst is state legislators.

Hoffman: To make change, there has to be a sense of outrage. Legislators can provide some of the outrage, and provide leadership as far as getting public opinion engaged. The legislature can also provide resources. The money can and should have strings on it – that's how you get your influence. We put money into schools that need help. Schools that improve greatly also get some money. There have to be carrots for the ones who do well, not just the ones who are failing.

What challenges does comprehensive school reform face?
Rawlings: I think a lot of the so-called new options that exist – like vouchers, charter schools, choice programs and alternative schools – reflect the inability of school systems and state legislatures to really ratchet up good practices that take place at one or two schools. To address systemic reform, you have to address some of the major issues like teacher practices and conduct and compensation, and, therefore, union issues. Reform at the district level eventually brings you to some of these big, more challenging political issues.

Hoffman: None of us has found a good way to engage the teachers. That is one of the stumbling blocks to school reform, because if you can't control who will be in your schools' workforce, you can't be successful. Teachers can be your best allies. But we really don't know how to get to teachers as individuals instead of through the union. The people who purport to speak for the teachers only speak on issues of salary and benefits. They never want to discuss the other issues. That's why New American Schools says teachers have to vote to use a model in a school, because otherwise you get people who are passive-aggressive, who won't say anything but won't help.

Do you have any advice for others undertaking comprehensive school reform?
Hoffman: The public is looking for leadership. Everybody is afraid of polls and public opinion. I've offended people without meaning to. As legislators, our role is like the little boy in the story about the emperor. You have to say, "oh look, he's got no clothes on." You embarrass people when you tell the truth, especially in a minority city with a minority-run administration. But I think that's the worst sort of racial patronization – to accept schools that don't work. You have to be willing to take the heat. You have to have courage.

Rawlings: The journey is going to be very tough. They should expect a lot of resistance among people who say they are for the children and love the children but want to maintain the status quo, which in most cases is not serving our children's interests. Also, they should have a long-term interest in solving this problem, instead of an immediate expectation of change.

Comprehensive school reform models must meet these criteria to receive federal funds:

- Uses innovative strategies and proven methods for student learning, bases teaching on reliable research and has been replicated in diverse schools
- Aligns instruction, curriculum, assessment, professional development, parent involvement, school management and technology to meet state standards
- Provides high-quality and continuous professional development for teachers
- Has measurable goals for student performance
- Is supported by school faculty, administrators and staff
- Involves parents and the community in planning and implementing reform
- Uses high-quality external assistance from a comprehensive school reform entity
- Evaluates the implementation of reform model and impact on student achievement
- Identifies how other resources (federal, state, local and private) will be used to support and sustain the reform effort.

Nevada: Legislating Reform

"We've seen what happens when legislators put attention and will into education — it really makes a difference," says Kathy St. Clair, Title I consultant for the Nevada Department of Education.

During the 1997 legislative session, a bipartisan effort spearheaded by Democratic Governor Bob Miller and Republican Senate Majority Leader Bill Raggio led to the Education Reform Act. For the first time, lawmakers created a system that awarded or sanctioned schools based on assessments of what students were learning.

The legislature allotted $3 million a year to intervene in schools that failed to improve student test scores. These schools submitted detailed improvement plans and had to adopt a reform model recommended by a legislative committee.

It appears that the extra money and attention are paying off. Last year, 23 schools were labeled "low-performing." This year, the number is down to eight.

In the program's second year, the legislature approved more funding. Lawmakers wanted to increase the number of schools using reform models and to support ongoing work in schools now off the "low-performing" list.

The tough work at the state level has been divided up among the Legislative Counsel Bureau, the State Department of Education and the Budget Division of the Governor's Office. According to Jeanne Botts, senior program analyst for the legislature's Fiscal Analysis Division, the partnership initially struggled over a common obstacle: turf issues.

Some people, she says, resented the legislature's stepping into what was perceived as education department territory. The legislature has taken the lead in overhauling standards, defining acceptable reform models and allocating money for reform. But members of all three groups have forged a cooperative working relationship. Together they review grant applications, visit schools and make budgetary recommendations to the legislature.

"In Nevada, there was no court order to improve the schools, but the governor and legislature felt that they had to get involved," says Botts. "They didn't just pass a bill and walk away. They worked hard to make sure that education reform happened as the legislation intended. As a result, there has been a real shift in how seriously teachers and administrators are taking the school improvement process."

Examples of Comprehensive School Reform Models

Accelerated Schools is based on the belief that students in at-risk situations have the same achievement potential as other students. The project incorporates a challenging curriculum, fast-paced learning and high expectations – an approach typically reserved for gifted-and-talented classes. Accelerated Schools leaders also believe that involving parents, using community resources, and ensuring participation of teachers and other school staff will increase the likelihood of student success. Additional goals are to reduce dropout rates, drug use and teenage pregnancy by creating a strong sense of educational accomplishment and self-worth.

Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound (ELOB) is based on the principles of Outward Bound: (1) more is learned by doing something for a reason than by listening to something being described, and (2) developing character and a sense of community is as important as developing academic skills and knowledge. ELOB is a comprehensive school design that uses intellectual investigations – "learning expeditions" – to improve achievement and build character. The primary goal is to raise student achievement dramatically by transforming every aspect of the school.

The principle behind *Success for All* is that every child can, and must, read and therefore must succeed in the early grades regardless of his or her background. The program emphasizes prevention and early intervention, rather than remediation, to help children realize their potential from the start. The primary goals are to bring young students to grade level in reading and other basic skills and to keep them performing at grade level in the elementary years.

Core Knowledge is based on the belief that knowledge builds on knowledge and, to achieve academic excellence and educational fairness, children need a solid, shared, specific core curriculum. The Core Knowledge Sequence is the heart of this program. Specific guidelines outline the skills and knowledge to be taught at each grade level, K-8, with each successive grade level building on the previous one.

3 State Education Department Support Is Key to Long-Term Success.

Almost everyone has a different take on what role state departments of education play in school reform. Some skeptics question their relevance to improving low-performing schools. Others view state education agencies as no more than "regulatory bureaucracies." Still others think they provide useful information on student demographics, test scores and teacher accreditation.

One thing is clear, however. When it comes to comprehensive school reform, state education agencies are in the eye of the storm. Federal funding for comprehensive school reform is funneled first to these agencies before it reaches districts and schools. State education departments can shape how states can help teachers, parents and district administrators implement comprehensive school reform for the long haul.

In the last two years, an increasing number of state education agencies are doing the following:

- Using comprehensive school reform to further their states' goals on accountability, standards, and assessments
- Developing long-term strategies to help schools implement comprehensive reform
- Helping districts and schools identify federal, state and district funding to support comprehensive reform
- Assisting schools in choosing comprehensive reform models that match their needs.

State department of education staff members have learned much in a relatively short period of time about their role in helping community members, parents, teachers and developers. Some staff had prior experience in earlier state and national efforts. Many of these lessons also have been discussed in research and captured in the experiences of schools and districts implementing comprehensive reform. Some of the lessons state education department staff have learned follow.

Recognize that schools in need are not necessarily schools that can succeed.

In the rush to award comprehensive school reform funding to low-performing schools, some states have neglected to assess schools' capacity for undertaking the difficult and lengthy reform process. A school's lack of preparedness to undertake reform could threaten comprehensive school reform's success.

"Often, schools that are least able to undertake reform — ones that lack leadership, structure, a supportive culture, that are dysfunctional and chaotic — are the ones most eligible to receive federal comprehensive school reform funds," says Jane Heibt, director of planning for the Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound reform model.

In response, some states have created special programs to help low-performing schools prepare for reform. These programs also ensure that the state and federal governments' considerable investments of time and money are used wisely.

In Florida, for example, the State Department of Education created a 25-member school improvement staff to work one-on-one with low-performing schools to craft improvement plans. The department, the Southeast Regional Educational Laboratory, the Comprehensive Assistance Center and Title I regional offices collaborate on ongoing training and support services for schools, including a three-day leadership conference for principals and other key stakeholders in schools that receive comprehensive school reform funding.

Find a strong match between schools and reform models.

Increasingly, state education agency leaders are helping school and district officials sort through the bewildering array of information about models to make careful, informed decisions. The task is not a simple one. Not only is the sheer amount of information tough to analyze, but it also is a struggle for most school and district personnel — and many state leaders — to assess whether research presented by developers is valid.

State departments of education have taken such steps as the following to assist schools:

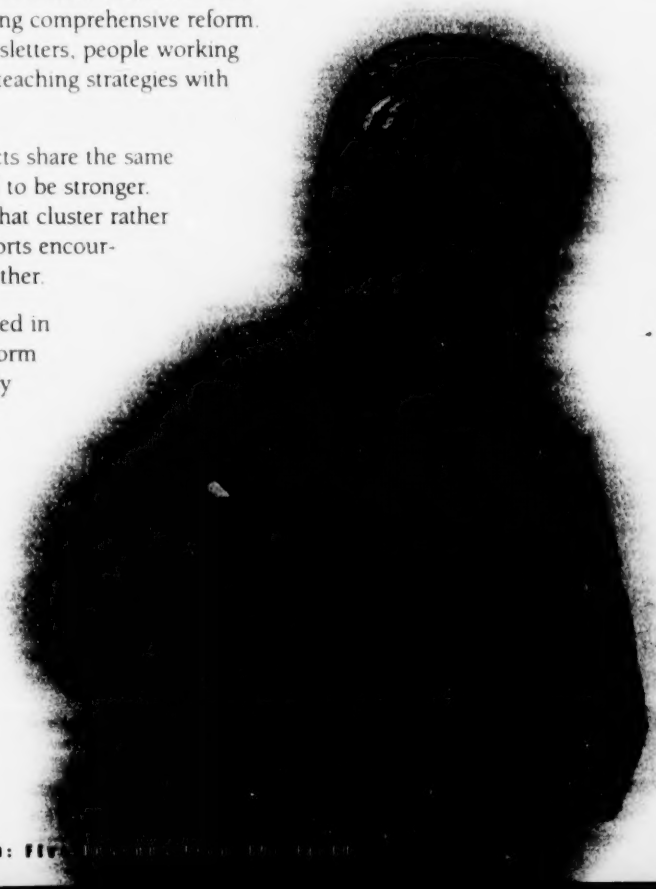
- Evaluating models to make sure they are compatible with state standards
- Analyzing the research and guiding schools toward models that work well under a variety of social, demographic and geographic conditions
- Encouraging school teams to visit schools implementing a model they are considering and/or bring in practitioners to talk to school staff about their experiences with a model and its developer
- Conducting workshops to determine whether a school and model are compatible.

Create stability in schools in spite of administrative changes.

One threat to successful comprehensive reform is the revolving door of leadership. Administrative turnover — at the school or district levels — often means that support for a program evaporates when a new principal or superintendent arrives with a different vision. Funding and attention are diverted to other programs, teachers may become demoralized by seeing their hard work unravel, and the reform process grinds to a halt. With thousands of superintendent and principal positions open in this country, it is inevitable that most communities will be affected by this problem.

Ideas for promoting staff resilience in the midst of reform include the following:

- **Reform networks:** State leaders can encourage the development of reform networks made up of teachers, administrators and others involved in implementing comprehensive reform. Through phone calls, electronic mail, meetings, training and newsletters, people working on reform can maintain daily contact and share innovations and teaching strategies with others in the state, region or country.
- **"Clustering":** When several schools in a district or nearby districts share the same model, developer support and implementation of the model tend to be stronger. States may choose to concentrate funds on schools and districts that cluster rather than those that take individual approaches. Clustering reform efforts encourages district change and allows more teachers to support one another.
- **Business leaders:** Because their future workforce is being educated in public schools, businesses have a huge stake in the success of reform efforts. Business leaders need to be involved in reform efforts early on to create the outside support needed to influence a new principal or superintendent to continue a reform plan that may already be in place.



Oregon: Targeting Low-Performing Schools

One of the toughest issues facing state leaders is whether the neediest schools should be targeted for comprehensive school reform since they often are poorly equipped to take on serious restructuring. In Oregon, leaders in the State Education Department targeted 136 of the lowest-performing schools for federal comprehensive school reform funding. Half of the schools were interested.

State department staff searched for schools with strong leadership and thoughtful school improvement plans. Districts had to demonstrate:

- Staff commitment, including the willingness to change curriculum
- Strong staff capacity and leadership to implement comprehensive reform
- Ability to provide technical assistance
- Capacity to make choices based upon a school's needs, rather than the district's.

State department staff members spent a half day at each school, stressing to faculty at mandatory meetings what it would take to implement comprehensive reform. They also talked informally with teachers to assess their commitment.

The state then narrowed the list to 20 schools and asked each staff to write a detailed proposal describing in depth how comprehensive reform would change their school.

Because faculty were part of the decisionmaking process, most schools exceeded the required 80% vote needed to undertake comprehensive reform. All 20 schools began implementing programs in the 1999-2000 school year. Staff members from these schools will coach principals and teachers in other schools implementing comprehensive reform for the first time.

In Utah, a group of business leaders has formed the Education Reform Foundation to support comprehensive school reform in public schools. The group, whose members want to remain anonymous, has invested up to $25,000 a year in schools not eligible to receive federal grants for comprehensive school reform. They are working closely with the Utah Department of Education to select grant recipients.

Utah: Strengthening Ties Between Schools and Developers

What do school staffs do if a developer falls through on promised help? What happens when a model does not match a school's needs? These are familiar issues to schools and districts implementing comprehensive reform models. And, it is something educators at the state level need to help schools address.

Some states are learning that the hard way.

In Utah, State Education Department comprehensive school reform specialist Nancy Casillas says the department did not do a good job early on of helping schools find the best model to meet their unique needs.

"We did things too rapidly and assumed the schools would be well-enough informed on their own. In reality, most schools were not equipped to find an appropriate model, and a number selected models that weren't suited to their situations."

Casillas and her colleagues now serve as liaisons between schools and developers to ensure that concerns are being addressed at both ends.

"Schools are sometimes intimidated by developers," she says. "Developers may come in with a great deal of expertise about how things will get done in the school, but they may not understand the day-to-day running of a school or the school's relationship with the community. School people may initially feel more comfortable talking to me than with the developer if they have a problem."

The state has intervened on a number of occasions. When a developer failed to provide technical assistance to one school, the state threatened to allow the school to abandon its contract with the developer and choose another model. The developer ultimately abided by the contract.

In other instances, the state helped iron out difficulties when the required professional development did not work with the school's timetable or when a developer was making too many demands that the school could not fulfill.

Tennessee: So You Want a Grant?

In Tennessee, staffs have to go through intensive training before their school can even apply for new funding to implement comprehensive reform.

After targeting 150 low-performing schools in high-poverty areas, the state held training during the school year. Participants learned about needs assessment, resource reallocation, team building, data analysis, grant-writing techniques and evaluation. They got advice from principals and teachers who had implemented comprehensive reform models.

Staff from approximately 32 schools completed the training, and most, if not all, of the schools will be awarded federal comprehensive school reform funding. Officials hope the training will help schools address the challenges and instill a commitment to the schoolwide reform early on.

4 Teachers Make Comprehensive School Reform Happen.

Any school reform effort will fail unless teachers believe it improves learning and shows results for students. Teachers must be involved from the start in the decisionmaking process. Although it seems obvious, many administrators, policymakers and others advocating reform fail to bring teachers to the table early on. Comprehensive reform is no exception; this strategy greatly affects teachers. It changes classroom instruction and requires many hours of hard work, and teachers have a large stake in this effort.

The earlier the better

Without the active support of a majority of teachers, comprehensive reform is doomed. Teachers are more likely to back an effort if they have been involved from the beginning. This means inviting teachers to help set goals, study models, interview developers and select the model.

Teachers not involved in the decisionmaking process may ignore comprehensive reform efforts or leave the school. Mandating a comprehensive reform model does not work.

"Ask anybody, and they will tell you that they get training and 20 new programs a year," says Kathie Stroh, educational issues coordinator for the Hartford Federation of Teachers. "But if teachers don't believe it's going to help them be a better teacher, they'll go into their classrooms, close the door and do whatever they please."

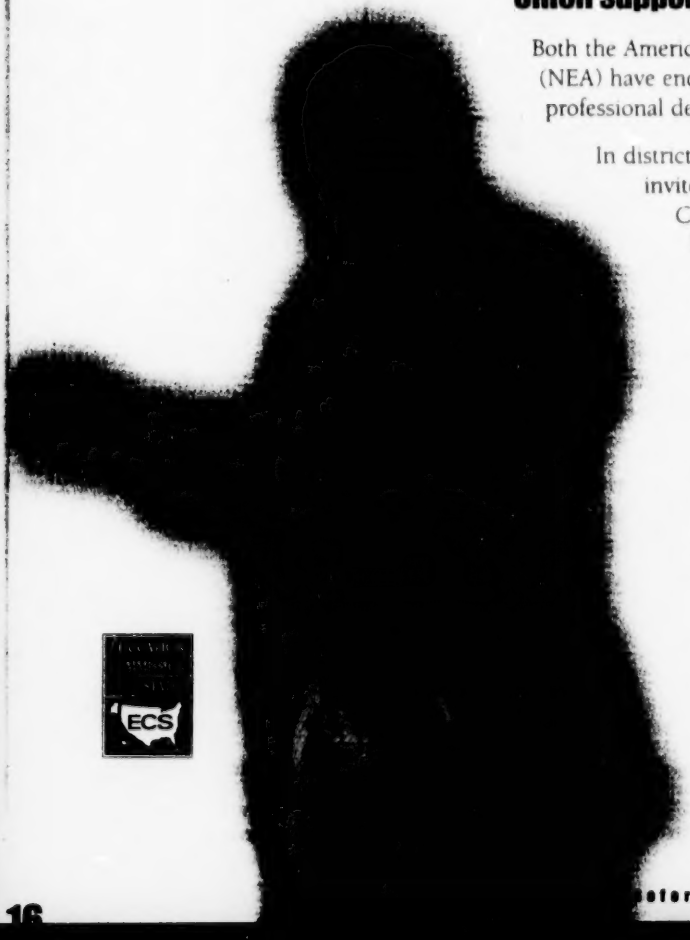
Many states and developers require a vote of 80% of school staff before a comprehensive school reform model is implemented. Schools and districts undertaking reform must seek broad-based support and offer voluntary transfers to teachers who do not wish to participate in reform efforts.

Union support vital

Both the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) and National Education Association (NEA) have endorsed comprehensive school reform, but have left decisions about professional development and teacher transfers up to the local unions.

In districts such as Cincinnati and Memphis, union representatives have been invited to participate from the very beginning in reform efforts. Consequently, issues of staff development and teacher quality have been addressed earlier, more thoroughly and more easily than in other districts where union representatives were brought in after the fact.

In Cincinnati, comprehensive school reform is a three-way partnership among the school district, New American Schools and AFT. Any new reform initiatives have to be approved by an Educational Initiatives Panel composed of 50% administrators and 50% union-appointed teachers. Two-thirds of the schools have comprehensive models, and all schools will have a comprehensive design in place by the year 2001.



Rethinking professional development

Comprehensive school reform demands dramatic shifts in curriculum, and with those shifts come changes in the way teachers teach. This requires considerably more time for professional development than what most schools and districts typically set aside. One model, Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound, declines to work with a school or district unless the administration earmarks 15 days per teacher every year for professional development.

Many states are pushing schools and districts seeking comprehensive school reform funds to tackle professional development for teachers in ways they never have before:

- In California, schools and districts have to explain in detail how they will conduct professional development before being considered for federal comprehensive reform funds.
- The San Antonio Independent School District allocates 3% of its general budget for professional development. With the help of state waivers, the district has increased the number of staff development days from two to eight days a year to support comprehensive school reform.
- Florida provides funding for professional development that amounts to $10 for every full-time employee in every school.

Carving out time for staff development does not mean much if the quality of the staff development is not improved as well. Crafting good, targeted professional development must be guided by the school's goals, the model the school is adopting and parents' desired outcomes for students.

"Too often, professional development isn't tied to improving student achievement," says Bernie Bond, AFT assistant director of educational issues. "It's just some nice presentation that makes people feel good for a while."

Teachers grumble that traditional professional development is notorious for "sit and listen." Some privately joke that it is a good time to grade papers on the sly. Why? This type of professional development is not geared toward what teachers need to know to improve student learning or tailored to reform efforts under way in a school.

"Teachers get a three-hour workshop and are told to go forth and implement reform," says Stroh. "But teachers don't know how to implement reform because they haven't had a chance to practice new techniques in the classroom. And if they don't believe it's going to affect students, they won't try."

In other words, it has to make sense and be part of a bigger picture.

Hartford Teachers' Union Front and Center

Kathie Stroh is the education issues coordinator for the Hartford (Connecticut) Federation of Teachers. Stroh was one of the driving forces behind comprehensive school reform when the issue first was introduced in Hartford in 1998.

What prompted you to lead the push for comprehensive school reform?
Our school district was in crisis. It had been taken over by the state. We lacked leadership. Everyone was searching for answers. The American Federation of Teachers (AFT) had provided us with information on proven programs, including comprehensive school reform. We ran with it.

Check out AFT's Web site at *www.aft.org* for more information

How did teachers respond to your efforts?
It ran the gamut from "why are you doing this?" to "this is not the role of the union" to "this is a great idea." Many teachers were already working on other (reform) programs, as hard as they could. So many things were coming down from the central office for so many years. Teachers wanted to know how this was going to be different and how much time it would take.

What difference does it make whether teachers and unions are involved early on?
Teachers can be resistant for a number of reasons – you know, "we've heard it all before" and "this too shall pass." If the union is supportive of comprehensive school reform, it deflates the naysayers and lends support to the teachers who are behind reform.

Have you learned any lessons along the way?

- **Middle management can sabotage reform efforts**: We had comprehensive school reform funding for three schools, all of which had faculty buy-in. In one school, the principal adopted the program but denied teacher involvement. In another school, teachers voted for Success for All, but the principal backed out. At the third school, the principal used all the information we provided, but forced teachers to adopt another program.
- **Communication is critical**: I went to school board meetings, wrote newsletters, made telephone calls to update teachers, and spoke to community, business and parent groups. It's about relationship building.
- **Get the right players in place**: We brought a state senator and a school board trustee to a national AFT conference in 1998 on redesigning low-performing schools. The trustee later convinced the board to allocate money for comprehensive reform in three schools. The senator secured a significant amount of money for one school implementing Success for All, and wrote a letter to Hartford elementary school principals asking them to talk to me about comprehensive reform. We involved parents, the legislature and the state department of education, too.
- **Work closely with the national teachers' union**: We got answers to our questions right away, which gave us credibility. We weren't talking off the top of our heads. AFT provided research on different models.
- **Turn a negative into a positive**: The legislature approved a state takeover of Hartford schools. Although it was a bitter pill to swallow at first, it forced cooperation and change. To avoid more punitive measures – like closing down schools – everyone had to cooperate to improve schools, and comprehensive school reform was one of the results.

Why is reform working in Hartford versus other cities where unions and districts are butting heads?
The bottom line is that progress was very slow until we got a new superintendent that supported this effort. The board of trustees was very careful whom they selected. They chose a superintendent who wanted the same thing that we did.

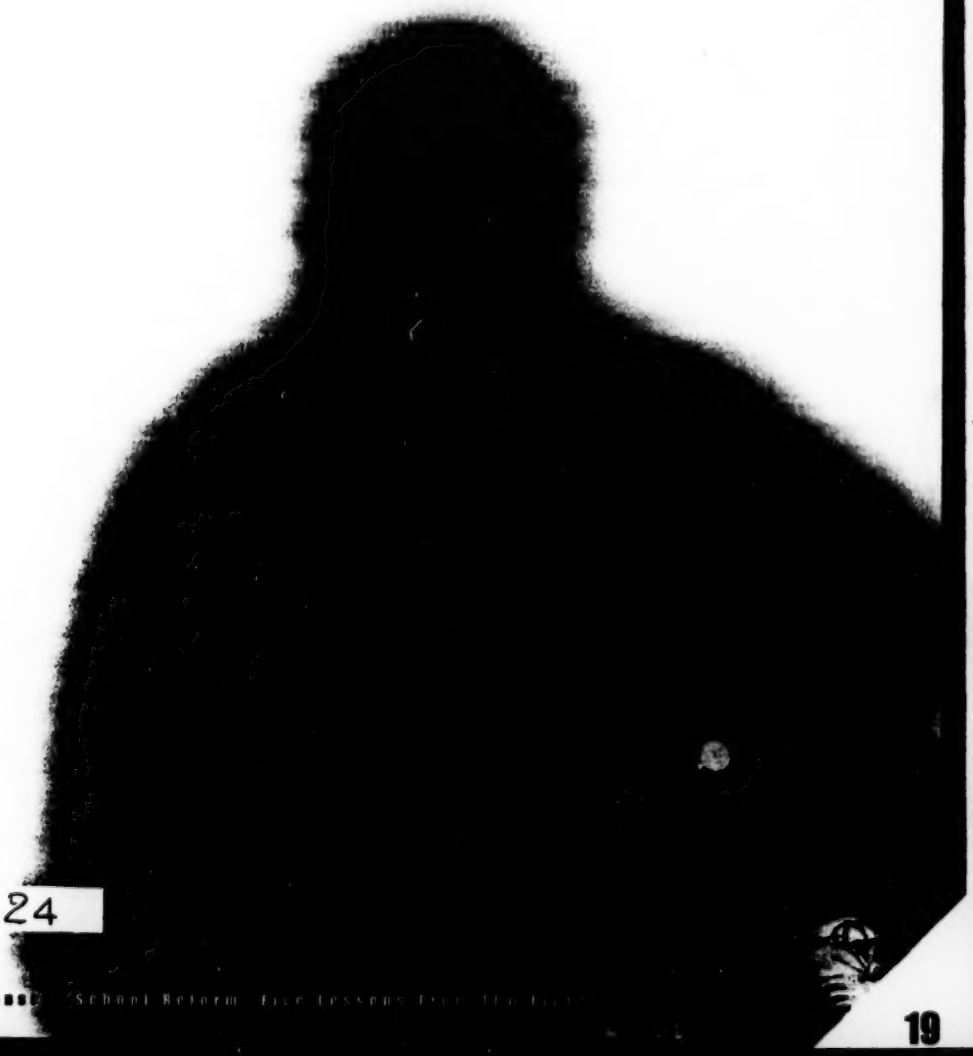
A Teacher's Perspective from the Classroom

Gayle Williams is a 3rd-grade teacher at Toussaint L'Ouverture Elementary School in Miami, Florida. In 1996, the school adopted Success for All. It was one of 40 on Dade County School District's list of critically low-performing schools.

Why comprehensive school reform?
Our school had a history of low performance. We finally got a principal who was interested in reform and she asked Success for All (SFA) to give a presentation to us. More than 80% of the staff voted for it. Teachers were very excited because they finally had some structure. Some teachers were doing whole language, others weren't. A lot of different things were being taught.

How did comprehensive school reform affect teaching?
We were all doing the same thing at the same time of day with lots of good staff development from SFA. Teachers felt like we were finally getting some stability and working toward the same goal. For once, the kids had some consistency from grade to grade.

What role did professional development play?
It had to play a big role. We were assigned a facilitator by the district who is responsible for making sure each teacher is being trained. SFA also sent someone to our school two to three times a year to conduct a "site implementation check" to make sure we were doing the program properly.



5 Evaluation – Early and Often – Is Critical.

One of the toughest, but most promising, efforts teachers, parents, state leaders, principals and others will undertake is comprehensive school reform. And one of the most critical aspects after beginning this work is diligently evaluating what is working and what is not. Unfortunately, many districts and schools are under pressure to identify and adopt a model immediately. This leaves little time for assessing whether the model is being implemented the way it was meant to be – a critical step that sets the stage for success or failure down the road.

The fact is that evaluation is costly, especially for district and school budgets already stretched thin. What is more, some schools need guidance from the state or others on how to use evaluation results to strengthen implementation. When schools do not get help, the faculty fails to implement the program properly and never realizes hoped-for student gains. As a result, they are back to square one. Nothing has changed, except that people are more frustrated now than ever before.

Monitor implementation as carefully as gains in student achievement.

The best-researched, best-designed models in the world will not work unless implemented properly. States can play an active role in helping schools evaluate comprehensive reform implementation and student outcomes.

State leaders might consider conducting site visits to schools implementing comprehensive reform to see firsthand how models are implemented and to identify strategies on how to overcome stumbling blocks along the way. State leaders also can seek help from the regional education laboratories to strengthen their evaluation efforts. The goal is to help state leaders help school staffs think about what it takes to evaluate whether a model is implemented correctly. Ultimately, it is about helping schools improve student performance.

An "evaluation checklist" for schools might include the following:

- Level of staff cooperation and commitment
- Development and adoption of new curriculum and activities
- Degree of parental involvement and satisfaction with the reform
- Student understanding of new forms of instruction
- Teacher understanding of new instructional methods
- Administrative support at the district and building levels for reform efforts
- Effectiveness of professional development
- Level of communication with and technical assistance from developer.

Parents, teachers and students need to see results.

While no one expects change to happen overnight, demonstrable change within a reasonable period of time is critical to earning support from the public and elected officials.

"The political climate doesn't give schools the luxury of time," says Chris Rhines of the Oregon Department of Education. "By the third year, schools are expected to show academic gains. If after a three-year period there haven't been any changes, there's something wrong."

Most researchers and state officials agree that it is unlikely to see results after a single year, but changes should be detectable by the end of the third year. Of course, it is still unknown whether many of the country's lowest-performing, highest-need schools will be able to transform their operations and outcomes within that timeframe.

Student mobility, teacher attrition, administrative turnover, changing tests and other factors can affect student progress. A multitude of adverse factors affect the functioning of all models in all schools and give researchers pause before attributing changes – positive or negative – to the operations of a particular model.

"It is admittedly hard to do valid research in education," says Steve Ross of the University of Memphis. "It's like a biologist always working with a contaminated petri dish. You simply can't control conditions in a school."

Studies of some reform models are so new they have few, if any, long-term results. One reason is that developers invested much of their energy early on into studying the implementation process rather than researching whether the models were boosting student achievement.

Increasingly, researchers are taking a harder look at comprehensive school reform models as interest in them grows.

"When you turn people's lives upside down, you have the responsibility to show them that it's going to improve things," says Rebecca Herman, project director for *An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform*.

Good resources that examine which reform models are showing promising results include:

- *An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform*, published by the American Institutes for Research, reviews more than 20 models and rates them according to evidence of student achievement and developer support to schools.
- *ECS' Promising Practices Database* on the ECS Web site (www.ecs.org) profiles the history, implementation strategies and research studies associated with many comprehensive school reform models.
- *A Catalog of School Reform Models*, by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and ECS, gives basic information on the models, including evidence of effectiveness.

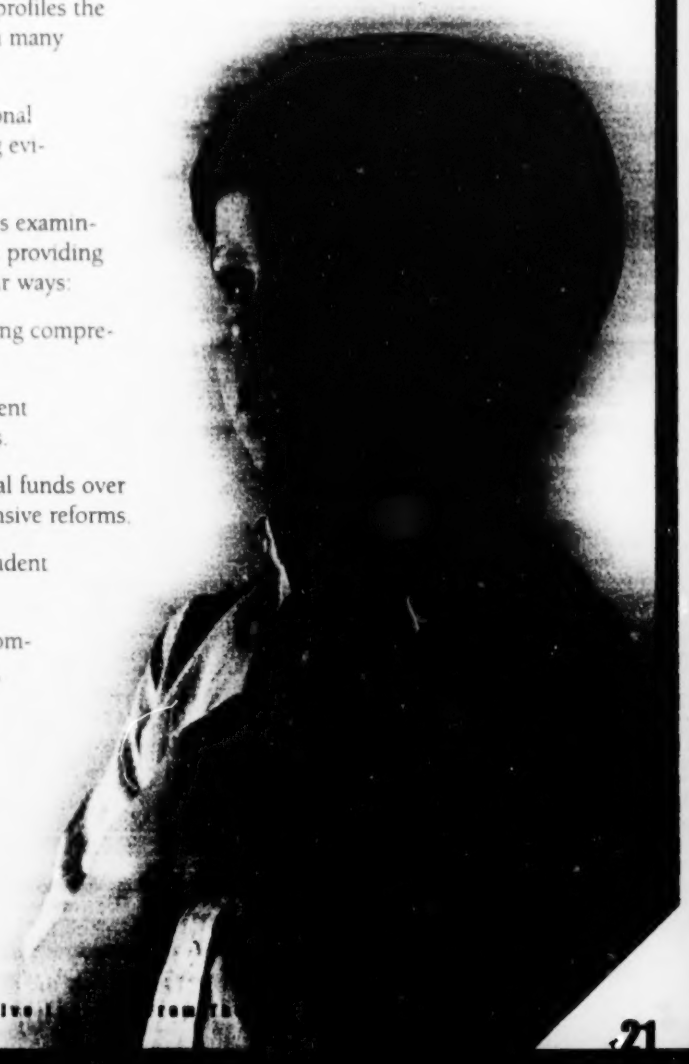
To learn more about student results, the U.S. Department of Education is examining the federal comprehensive school reform program's effectiveness and providing more in-depth information about the models and implementation in four ways:

- *CSRD in the Field* looks at 10 schools in the early stages of implementing comprehensive reform and provides guidance to schools and states.
- *A national database* compiled by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory will have descriptions of all schools receiving federal funds.
- *The National Longitudinal Survey* will track 900 schools receiving federal funds over three years, as well as a sample of Title I schools not doing comprehensive reforms.
- *Field focus studies* will take an in-depth look at implementation and student achievement at a small number of sites.

In addition, several states and districts have begun to collect data that compare schools implementing comprehensive reforms to those that are not, and make decisions based on those results. The more statewide data information available, the better – providing state leaders and educators know how to apply this information in a way that allows them to make better-informed decisions about comprehensive reform.

For more information, see the U.S. Department of Education Web site at www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/compreform.

Check out the ECS Web site at www.ecs.org for the Promising Practices Database.



Memphis Study Shows Gains

A 1998 study by Steve Ross, senior researcher at the Center for Research in Education Policy at the University of Memphis, examined the influence of eight models on student performance as measured by Tennessee's state-mandated standardized achievement test. Six NAS models and Accelerated Schools and Paideia were included.

Using the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System, the study compared year-to-year gains in five subjects (reading, mathematics, language, science and social studies) among 25 Memphis elementary schools that adopted comprehensive school reform models in the 1995-96 school year. The study matched control schools, all other elementary schools in the district and national norms.

The study's key findings included the following:

- After two years of using comprehensive school reform models, students at the public schools that adopted comprehensive reform models showed significant gains in achievement over students at other schools.
- Test scores indicated that these students, across all grades and subjects, were improving at a faster rate than the national average.

In a follow-up study published in June 1999, Ross and his colleagues found the following:

- Several designs – Accelerated Schools, Roots and Wings, and Co-NECT – had the strongest impact on student achievement. The design showing the strongest and only significant effect across all subjects was Co-NECT.
- High-poverty schools seemed to derive the greatest benefits from comprehensive school reform when compared to demographically similar schools that had not implemented comprehensive school reform.

The Power of Research To Influence Good Policy

Robert Slavin, co-director of the Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed At Risk, Johns Hopkins University, is the developer of two comprehensive school reform models, Success for All and Roots and Wings. He also is the author with Olatokunbo Fashola of Show Me the Evidence! Proven and Promising Programs for America's Schools.

What impact has comprehensive school reform had on research?
More money is flowing into research and development. Research is actually being used to solve big problems, rather than appearing in some arcane journal.

What impact does research have on educators and policymakers?
It changes the way educators think about how much work they have to do to find the real evidence, and what funders and developers need to show they perform well. At the other end, school and district and state people will be paying more attention to research because they need it and it's more accessible to them.

Until now, there's been little incentive for developers to do rigorous research. Research is expensive and takes time, and most developers have not done it because they haven't had to. Every developer can tell a story about one or two schools that did well under their model, but there might be dozens more schools that didn't do so well. Programs were rewarded for looking good, not being good.

What role can states play?
Almost all states have some state assessment. If you monitor schools and match them to control schools serving similar populations, that's an evaluation. We now have TAAS [Texas Assessment of Academic Skills] online. Studies that would have taken us $1 million and years to do we can now do in an afternoon because we can get the TAAS information off the Internet. Legislatures and governors could be helpful by hooking money and consequences to evaluation.

Evaluate, Evaluate, Evaluate

Steve Ross, professor at the Policy Research Institute of the University of Memphis, is a nationally recognized authority on the evaluation of comprehensive school reform programs who has studied the Memphis school system's efforts.

Do schools necessarily need outside assistance to conduct an evaluation?
Schools will generally have a difficult time designing a meaningful evaluation on their own; they don't have the evaluation expertise that's necessary. If they contact universities or consultants, they may be quoted prices that are too high. States need to pull together people and resources to help the schools with evaluation. Otherwise, the schools will do a shoddy job because they don't have the tools that they need.

What role does evaluation play in telling us whether the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD) is effective?
The scary thing about this CSRD effort is that schools will put two or three years into this program but aren't putting enough resources into evaluation. [Likewise], the government has put millions of dollars into program implementation, but only thousands into investigating its effectiveness. Medicine, for example, spends as much on research as on practice. But, because in education there's so little solid research, there's a pendulum continually swinging between untested and unproven but fleetingly popular programs.

What have you learned from the results of your Memphis schools study?
Memphis saw positive results after two years. But, in Memphis, unlike most school districts, there was tremendous coordination from the very beginning to make school restructuring work. The teachers' union, New American Schools, the superintendent and the University of Memphis were all involved. Memphis was a Cadillac in terms of having every resource to succeed.

A Look at the Future of Comprehensive School Reform

If you had asked a teacher, principal or state legislator a few years ago what comprehensive school reform was, he or she probably would have looked at you and said, "comprehensive what?" As recently as 1997, many state leaders were learning of this kind of school initiative for the first time, even though the school improvement effort had been around since the early 1990s, and in some cases even earlier. Increased funding for comprehensive reform at the federal level pushed this effort into the national spotlight. After the hard work that has gone into scaling up this initiative, those on the front lines hope to ensure that comprehensive school reform is here for the long haul. To do so means confronting emerging challenges and finding creative solutions.

Keeping state leaders on the mark

"The next year could make or break comprehensive school reform," says Gina Burkhardt, executive director of the North Central Regional Educational Laboratory in Oakbrook, Illinois. Burkhardt, who works closely with state leaders and educators in the Midwest, has seen firsthand the challenges that will continue to face states, districts and schools as they move into the next century. These challenges include:

- Integrating comprehensive school reform into broader reform efforts at the state, district and local levels
- Ensuring in-depth and quality technical assistance from developers, some of whom already are stretched thin by high demand
- Providing timely information that assists state and district leaders in becoming sophisticated consumers of research-based designs and other models that claim to be comprehensive in scope.

For the first time, comprehensive school reform has pushed leaders in many states to examine how they structure school improvement programs, how public accountability fits in and how best to provide support to schools in ways they never have before. State leaders are looking at these strategies and others as a complete package, and these states, experts agree, are the ones making the greatest strides.

"They know that accountability pressures have grown, that low-income schools are lagging behind and that this program offers significant change for a limited number of schools – a big change," says Cynthia Brown, director of resource equity for the Council of Chief State School Officers.

Creating savvy consumers

This report has examined the challenges facing those who implement comprehensive school reform at the school, district and state levels, but finding the right "tools" to help teachers, legislators and administrators can be tough – even though they are readily available. There is a bazaar of products to choose from – toolkits, booklets, reports, journal articles, newsletters, Web sites and publications on comprehensive school reform. The list is endless, but it is not always objective, complete or up-to-date in a way that meets the needs of consumers. Little work has been done to connect these resources for consumers faced with tough decisions and pressing deadlines.

For example, one guidebook helps principals identify the most appropriate model for their schools. Another publication tells district administrators how to link standards to new comprehensive reform efforts. A Web site walks teachers through the unique challenges facing rural districts. While the resources are available and useful, the greatest need today is to organize and synthesize this avalanche of materials to help consumers easily find the information they need. Once this hard work is done, the resources available can have a powerful impact on school improvement efforts across the country.

Further thought also must be given to what pieces are missing:

- How well do consumers of the comprehensive school reform models grasp whether a model meets all nine criteria spelled out in the federal legislation. For example, a school may identify a model that meets its students' needs, but staff may not have thought of an in-depth strategy to train teachers how to use the model.
- How will this reform effort fit into the state's broader reform agenda? The state may place a heavy emphasis on standards, but the standards created by the developer of a reform model may not mesh with the state's priorities.
- Does the approved developer have the capacity to meet demand? Developers that are stretched thin with few resources and staff mean educators may not receive the degree of technical assistance required to bring a comprehensive school reform model to scale.

Balancing supply and demand

The big challenges confronting the people behind comprehensive school reform models have major implications for states, districts and schools. The growing interest in comprehensive reform has ignited fierce demand for more models.

Prior to the federal funding, some developers worked in one or two states providing technical assistance. Others concentrated on a regional approach, and even fewer worked nationwide. When Congress approved new funding for comprehensive school reform, the dynamics changed overnight. Suddenly, the developers were under pressure to provide one-on-one technical assistance to schools across the country, and many acknowledge they were not prepared.

The developers were caught in a difficult position. While they struggled to sustain their current level of assistance, at the same time, they had to increase their capacity to meet new demand. This led to questions about the quality of technical assistance provided to schools and districts. How could developers ensure states, districts and schools they could provide the in-depth technical assistance needed?

"There are examples of places where at the outset, the technical assistance was not as strong as we would have liked," says the U.S. Department of Education's Bill Kincaid. "But some of those problems have been dealt with, and schools and developers are much more in sync."

New American Schools is developing standards for comprehensive school reform models. The purpose of these standards is to separate good models from substandard ones. "We're looking at several things: the quality of the design teams, capacity and sustainability, tools and assistance for districts, and the state policy agenda," says President John Anderson.

Other efforts to boost the capacity of developers and improve their technical assistance to schools and districts include activities at the federal level to do the following:

- Design a competition for development of new models
- Build the capacity of existing models with a strong emphasis on rural schools
- Create a national information clearinghouse that specializes in comprehensive school reform.

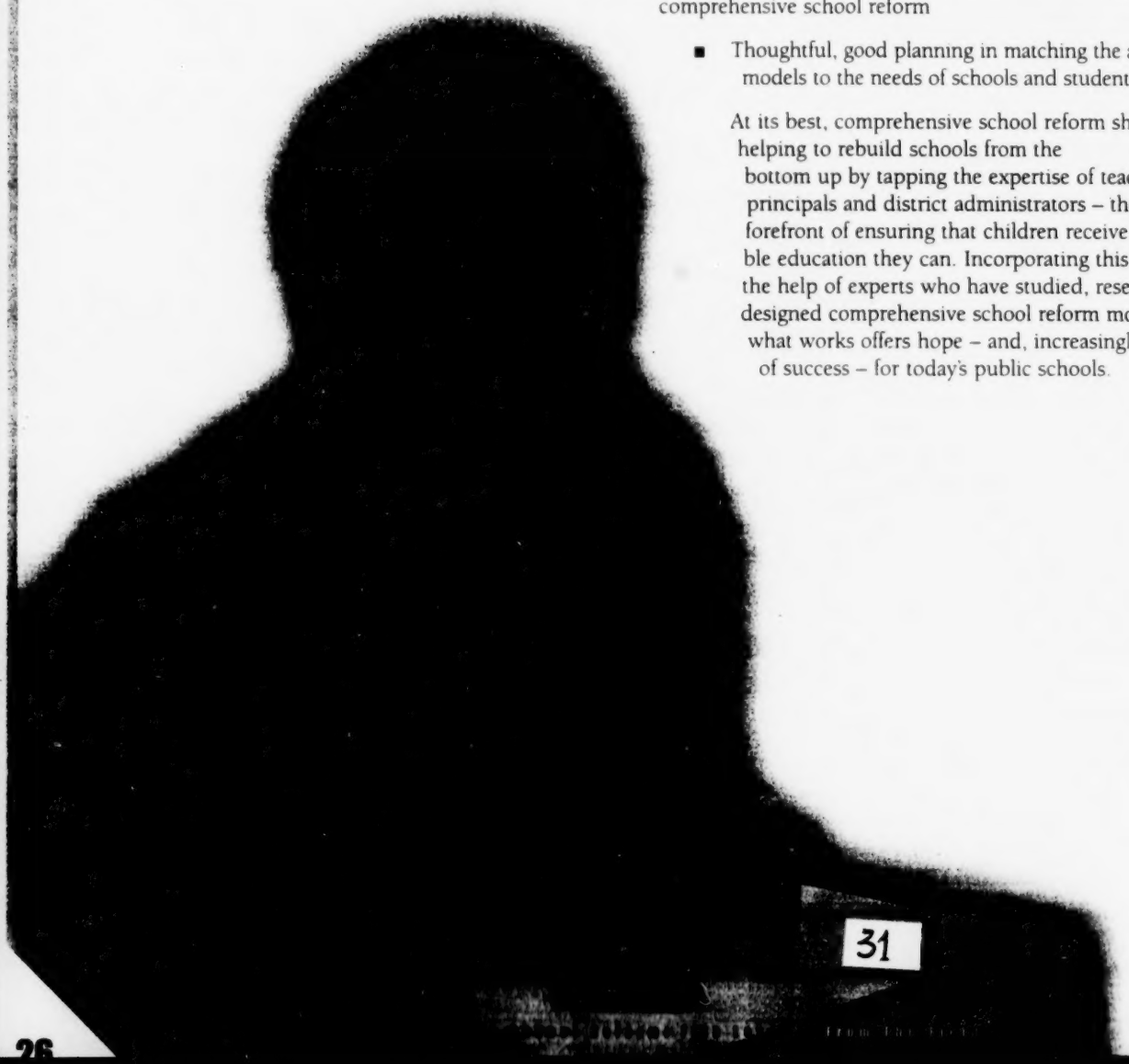
Closing thoughts

Comprehensive school reform is a breakthrough that allows schools, districts and states to move beyond finger-pointing and blame to real improvements in student learning. Implementing this reform strategy is not easy, however. There is nothing tougher than spending money differently, sticking with an approach long enough to see results, and overcoming turf battles along the way.

Educators, administrators, parents and legislators must continue to focus on what really counts: insisting on lasting results for all children. Comprehensive school reform, when done well, combines the best of what research has found to work in the classroom:

- Strong school, district and state leadership
- Improved and targeted professional development
- Meaningful parental involvement
- Teacher involvement and decisionmaking
- Use of comprehensive school reform models with a proven track record of success
- Alignment of instruction, curriculum, assessment, professional development, parental involvement and school management to meet state standards
- Support from school faculty and district staff
- Constant evaluation of whether a model is implemented correctly and what impact it is having on student learning and achievement
- High-quality external assistance from individuals experienced in comprehensive school reform
- Thoughtful, good planning in matching the appropriate models to the needs of schools and students.

At its best, comprehensive school reform shows promise for helping to rebuild schools from the bottom up by tapping the expertise of teachers, parents, principals and district administrators – the people at the forefront of ensuring that children receive the best possible education they can. Incorporating this expertise with the help of experts who have studied, researched and designed comprehensive school reform models based on what works offers hope – and, increasingly, a track record of success – for today's public schools.



Selected Resources on Comprehensive School Reform

General information

American Federation of Teachers (1997). *CSRD Packet*. Washington, DC: AFT.

Consortium for Policy Research in Education (1998). *States and Districts and Comprehensive School Reform*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania.

Education Commission of the States (1998). *Comprehensive School Reform: Allocating Federal Funds*. Denver, CO: ECS.

Education Commission of the States (1998). *Comprehensive School Reform: Criteria and Questions*. Denver, CO: ECS.

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (1999). *Noteworthy Perspectives on Comprehensive School Reform*. Aurora, CO: McREL.

New American Schools (1997-99). *Getting Better by Design Series*, Washington, DC: NAS.

New American Schools (1999). *Working Toward Excellence: Examining the Effectiveness of New American Schools Designs*. Washington, DC: NAS.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (1998). *Comprehensive Reform: A Guide for School Leaders*. Oak Brook, IL: NCREL.

Saran, Roopal M. (1999, June). "Despite Growing Pains, CSRD Is Transforming Schools," *Title I Monitor*, June 1999, Volume 4, Issue 6, pp. 1-24.

U.S. Department of Education (1998). *Guidance on the Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program*. Washington, DC: USDOE.

Identifying appropriate models

Education Commission of the States (1998). *Comprehensive School Reform: Identifying Effective Models*. Denver, CO: ECS.

Educational Research Service (1998). *Comprehensive Models for School Improvement: Finding the Right Match and Making It Work*. Arlington, VA: ERS.

New American Schools (1998). *Blueprints for School Success: A Guide to New American Schools Designs*. Arlington, VA: NAS.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (1997). *Comprehensive School Reform: Making Good Choices for Your School*. Oak Brook, IL: NCREL.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (1998). *Catalog of School Reform Models: First Edition*. Portland, OR: NWREL.

Ross, S.R.; Henry, D.; Phillipsen, L.; Evans, K.; Smith, L.; and Buggey, T. (1997). "Matching Restructuring Programs to Schools: Selection, Negotiation, and Preparation," *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, Volume 8, Issue 1, pp. 45-71.

Research and evaluation

Bodilly, Susan; Keltner, Brent; Purnell, Susanna; Reichardt, Robert; Schuyler, Gina (1998). *Lessons from New American Schools' Scale-up Phase: Prospects for Bringing Designs to Multiple Schools*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND.

Herman, Rebecca (1999). *An Educators' Guide to Schoolwide Reform*, Arlington, VA: Educational Research Service.

Kentucky Department of Education (1998). *Results-Based Practices Directory: A Consumer Guide to Effective Programs*. Louisville, KY: KDE.

Lein, Laura; Johnson, Joseph F.; and Ragland, Mary (1997). *Successful Texas Schoolwide Programs*. Austin, TX: Charles A. Dana Center, University of Texas at Austin.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (1998). *Comprehensive School Reform Initiative Evaluation Workbook for Education Agencies*. Oak Brook, IL: NCREL.

Ross, Steven M. (1998). *Evaluation of School Design Model Implementation in Memphis City Schools: 1996-1997*. Memphis, TN: Center for Research in Educational Policy, University of Memphis.

Slavin, Robert E., and Fashola, O.S. (1998). *Show Me the Evidence! Proven and Promising Programs for America's Schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Stringfield, Sam (1996). *The Three-Year Effects of 10 Promising Programs on the Academic Achievement of Students Placed at Risk*. New York, NY: American Educational Research Association.

School reform networks

Education Commission of the States (1997). *A Policymaker's Guide to Education Reform Networks*. Denver, CO: ECS.

Education Commission of the States (1998). *School Reform Networks, Technology and Accountability: Keys to Reform*. Denver, CO: ECS.

Web sites

American Federation of Teachers: http://www.aft.org/edissues/csrd

Consortium for Policy Research in Education: http://www.upenn.edu/gse/cpre/

Education Commission of the States: http://www.ecs.org

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory: http://www.mcrel.org/csrd/

New American Schools: http://www.naschools.org

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory: http://www.ncrel.org

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory: http://www.nwrel.org/csrdp/

RAND: http://www.rand.org/centers/iet.IETpubs.html#restructure

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory: http://www.//sedl.org/csrd/welcome.html

U.S. Department of Education: http://www.ed.gov/offices/OESE/compreform

Acknowledgments

This report was written by Lesley Dahlkemper, Linda Fredericks, Elizabeth Holman and Suzanne Weiss. Further assistance and input was provided by Kay McClenney, Robert Palaich, Judy Bray, Julie O'Brian, Judie Mathers, Sherry Freeland Walker and Josie Canales of the ECS staff, and Tracy Zimmerman of the Hauser Group. Design by Square One Creative.

Many people generously contributed their time and insights to this project. The writers wish to thank:

Barbara Alexander
Principal Consultant
Grants Management Division
Illinois State Board of Education

John Anderson
President
New American Schools

Everett Barnes, Jr.
President
RMC Research Corporation

Susan Bodilly
Senior Research Scientist
RAND

Bernie Bond
Assistant Director
Educational Issues Department
American Federation of Teachers

Jeanne Botts
Senior Program Analyst
Fiscal Analysis Division
Legislative Counsel Bureau
Nevada Legislature

Cynthia Brown
Director
Resource Center on Equity Education
Council of Chief State School Officers

Gina Burkhardt
Educational Executive Director
North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

Nancy Casillas
Title I/CSRD Specialist
Utah Department of Education

Rennae Chapman
Coordinator of School Reform
Tennessee Department of Education

Patricia Cheavers
Program Specialist/CSRD Contact
Florida Department of Education

Tom Corcoran
Senior Researcher
Consortium for Policy Research in Education

Ethel Edwards
Program Consultant
Kansas Department of Education

Steven Fleischman
Assistant Director
Educational Issues Department
American Federation of Teachers

Jane Heibt
Director of Planning
Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound

Rebecca Herman
Project Director
American Institutes of Research

Barbara Hoffman
Maryland State Senator

Gerry House
Superintendent
Memphis City Schools

Joe Johnson
Researcher
STAR Center
Charles Dana Center
University of Texas at Austin

Bill Kincaid
Project Manager
Comprehensive School Reform
Demonstration Program
U.S. Department of Education

Carolyn Wilson Koerschen
Coordinator of Powerful Learning
National Center for Accelerated Schools Project

Sabrina Laine
Director
Evaluation Policy Information Center
North Central Regional Educational Laboratory

Terry Nunn
Division Administrator, Grants Management Division
Illinois State Board of Education

Jo O'Brien
Branch Manager
Results-Based Practice Team
Kentucky Department of Education

Zenobia O'Neal
Director
New York State Title I
New York State Education Department

Howard "Pete" Rawlings
Chairman, House Appropriations Committee
Maryland House of Delegates

Chris Rhines
Education Program Specialist
Oregon Department of Education

Mary Rollefson
Principal Researcher
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
U.S. Department of Education

Steve Ross
Professor
Center for Research in Educational Policy
University of Memphis

Mary Anne Schmitt
Vice President for Public Policy and Field Services
New American Schools

Robert Slavin
Co-director
Center for Research on the Education of Students Placed at Risk
Johns Hopkins University

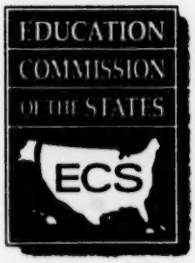
Kathy St. Clair
Title I Consultant
Nevada Department of Education

Kathie Stroh
Education Issues Coordinator
Hartford Federation of Teachers

Hannah Walker
Director
District and School Support Division
California Department of Education

Kathleen Ware
Associate Superintendent
Cincinnati Public Schools

Gayle Williams
3rd Grade Teacher
Toussaint L'Ouverture Elementary School



Education Commission of the States

707 17th Street, Suite 2700

Denver, CO 80202-3427

303-299-3600

fax: 303-296-8332

e-mail: ecs@ecs.org

www.ecs.org